General George S. Patton was not an Operational Artist

A Monograph

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Abstract

General George S. Patton was not an Operational Artist, by MAJ Mark E. Larson, United States Army, 48 pages.

Since WWII, historians have lionized General Patton for his bold and daring leadership during Allied campaigns. His many biographers have highlighted his ability to instill discipline, remove incompetent leaders, and form an effective staff. While these attributes evolved in his persona through his military training, Patton applied his intellect to develop a deep understanding of the new methods of warfare that armies encountered on the battlefields of WWII. The application of operational art now required knowledge grounded in the close coordination of air, sea, and land assets to achieve victories at both the strategic and tactical level. While historical examples of daring victories demonstrate what western culture loves in a war hero, a critical analysis of Patton's actions reveal a more compelling story. Closer examination of his actions in the latter stages of the Tunisian campaign, during the Sicilian campaign, and in Western Europe from Normandy to the Rhineland, demonstrate that he excelled at achieving tactical successes, but did not perform well when integrating those tactical successes in campaigns to achieve strategic aims. Patton developed a reputation as a bold and daring leader; however, analysis of WWII campaigns reveals that he did not apply what the US Army now refers to as operational art.

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Acknowledgments

I began this process with a desire to gain a greater appreciation and understanding of operational art. After speaking with Dr. Mark T. Calhoun about my interest in military history and the practice of operational art, he suggested that I explore the myth surrounding General George S. Patton and the idea of military genius and his inability to grasp the fundamentals of operational art. With very limited knowledge of Patton and operational art, I hesitantly began my journey of research into this controversial American icon. This monograph represents my understanding of what operational art is and the inability of one our most famous Generals to adhere to its precepts.

I would be remiss if I did not publicly thank the people that supported me throughout this process. First, I would like to thank Dr. Mark T. Calhoun for his unwavering support during the research process and the completion of this monograph; without him, this simply would not be possible. Second, I would like to thank my wife, Anne, and my son, Gavin for their remarkable patience and support. Lastly, I would like to thank the SAMS staff and faculty, particularly COL David Wood, for his encouragement and mentorship.

Acronyms

AGF	Army Ground Forces
CG	Commanding General
CINC	Commander in Chief
ETO	European Theater of Operations
FSR	Field Service Regulation
FUSA	First United States Army
FUSAG	First United States Army Group
ISAF	International Security Afghanistan Forces
OPD	Operations Division
POW	Prisoner of War
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
SUSA	Seventh United States Army
TUSA	Third United States Army
US	United States
WWII	World War Two

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Introduction

General George S. Patton was not the military genius that historians have made him out to be. Following the end of WWII and his death in 1945, the media, historians, and even former German adversaries raised his reputation to mythical proportions. Today, one still encounters the continued fascination with Patton in works such as Bill O'Reilly's *Killing Patton,* likening him to Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, and even Jesus.[1] This longstanding legacy begs the question of whether Patton really does stand among the great captains in history. Perhaps a combination of historical memory, media glorification, and American culture's affinity for the heroic figure afforded him undue recognition, diverting attention from other generals who performed (or could have performed) just as well or even better in WWII. His sudden death certainly seems to have contributed to his legendary status, further skewing the all-important perception from the reality of his capabilities.

As John Lynn wrote in *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*, "the reality of war differs from the discourse of war and is to some degree countered by efforts to make reality better by conforming to expectations." Francis Ford Coppola's 1970 film "Patton" had a lasting influence on the public's perception, contributing further to the separation of the reality of Patton's generalship from the myth that such portrayals have created over time. The alteration of history and the misrepresentation of the past have a long history of their own.[2] This led to a public memory of Patton as depicted in popular culture – which essentially depicted him the way

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[1] Bill O'Reilly, *Killing Patton: The Strange Death of the World War II's Most Audacious General* (New York, NY: Henry Holt Publishing, 2014), preambles to this work state that "readers around the world have thrilled to Killing Lincoln, Killing Kennedy, and Killing Jesus" The statement suggests Patton is recognized in the same vein as Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, and Jesus Christ.

[2] John L. Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 136-37.

American society wanted to remember him; and in a way that does not mesh particularly well with reality. Americans love a winner and its popular heroes; but one wonders whether in Patton's case historians have provided for scholarly purposes an accurate portrayal of his ability to direct large forces in a manner most likely to achieve the strategic aims of the Allied forces. The myth of Patton might not stem solely from the fiction of the popular media—it might reveal a predisposition within the US military itself for a particular style of leadership. This leads to an important question with ramifications for modern military leaders regarding the need, or perceived need for combat leaders like the flamboyant military genius that Patton has come to represent. Perhaps the Army benefits as much, or more, from the leadership which Martin Blumenson referred to when describing the US Army's other, less flamboyant officers of WWII, as "generally workmanlike."[3]

Background

Since WWII, historians have lionized General Patton for his bold and daring leadership during Allied campaigns. His many biographers have highlighted his ability to instill discipline, remove incompetent leaders, and form an effective staff.[4] While these attributes evolved in his persona through his military training and experience, Patton consciously applied his intellect in an effort to develop a deep understanding of the new methods of warfare that armies encountered on

[3] Martin Blumenson "America's World War II Leaders in Europe: Some Thoughts." *Parameters* 19, no. 4 (December 1989): 3.

[4] Dennis Showalter, *Patton and Rommel: Men of War in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2005), 204. Showalter pointed out that Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall respected Patton for his consistently successful performance of his assigned duties and the fact that, in Marshall's words, "George will take a unit through hell and high water." Martin Blumenson, *Patton: The Man Behind the Legend 1885-1945* (New York, NY: William Morrow Publishing, 1985), 165. Blumenson noted a key idea Patton summarized before leaving the National Desert Training Center Patton "Combat formations and materiel were, he believed, secondary in importance to discipline, rapid and accurate shooting."

the battlefields of WWII. The application of operational art in the motorized and mechanized operational environment of WWII required the ability to maintain the close coordination of air, sea, and land assets to achieve victories at both the strategic and tactical level; but it also required a deep appreciation for the importance of logistics, tempo versus speed, and operational risk versus flamboyant gamble.[5]

While historical examples of daring victories demonstrate what western culture loves in a war hero, a critical analysis of Patton's actions reveal a more compelling story. Closer examination of his actions in the latter stages of the Tunisian campaign, during the Sicilian campaign, and in Western Europe from Normandy to the Rhineland demonstrate that he excelled at achieving tactical successes, but did not perform well when integrating those tactical successes in campaigns to achieve strategic aims. Patton developed a widespread reputation during his long career as a bold and daring leader; however, analysis of WWII campaigns in which he participated reveals that he did not apply what the US Army now refers to as operational art.[6]

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[5] Antulio Joseph Echevarria II, *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present*, ed. John Andreas Olsen and Martin Van Creveld (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 138. Echevarria defined operational art as, "the 'way' that is used to move military means in a direction of achieving strategic aims." The Allies did not use the term operational art during WWII; however, they conducted operations in the way the US military uses the term today.

[6] U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 4–1. For Army forces, this manual defines operational art as "the pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose. This approach enables commanders and staffs to use skill, knowledge, experience, and judgment to overcome the ambiguity and intricacies of a complex, ever changing, and uncertain operational environment to better understand the problem or problems at hand. Operational art applies to all aspects of operations and integrates ends, ways, and means, while accounting for risk."

Methodology

Demonstrating the validity of this hypothesis involves defining the Allied approach to operational art during WWII. Analysis of Allied campaigns in which Patton commanded at various levels from 1942 to 1945 illustrates the overarching Allied approach to operational art, and the uniquely American approach, which did not always mesh well with that of America's allies. Focusing on Patton's actions in these campaigns illustrates the divergence of his methods from the appropriate and successful methods employed by Allied operational artists. While many American commanders understood how to employ the means available to the Allies appropriately to integrate tactical actions into campaigns that achieved strategic aims, Patton proved less well rounded in this respect than many of his peers. He possessed remarkable tactical prowess and—in many ways—exceptional leadership ability, but he often created friction for commanders seeking to conduct operational art in the method most appropriate to the situation.

Analysis of the similarities and differences between Patton's approach to mechanized warfare during WWII and the effective Allied execution of operational art reveal the divergence in his methods. This analysis includes the critiques of historians, politicians, Patton's superiors, and evidence drawn from several historical cases. It reveals that his tactical employment of combat power, while bold and daring, did not fit within the overall Allied approach to operational art in the Mediterranean and Western European campaigns. Similarly, assessment of Patton's actions as the Third US Army (TUSA) Commander in Western Europe—in particular, comparison of his willingness to adhere to Eisenhower's broad front strategy to that of the other Army level Commanders assigned to Bradley's Twelfth Army Group after the Normandy

invasion—reveals that even when given this chance to redeem himself, Patton continued to display maverick behavior not in keeping with that of an operational artist.[7]

The Allied Approach to Operational Art, 1942 to 1945

The Allied approach to operational art evolved dramatically from 1942 to 1945 because of both the dynamic leadership responsible for the North African Campaign, and the necessity to achieve victory more effectively. From the North African landing in 1942 to the end of the campaign in Western Europe, ground forces commanders went through a continual process of learning as they sought to master American operational art. Following the completion of Allied operations in North Africa and the eventual surrender of the Germans in Tunis, General Eisenhower held a conference to determine the proper application of forces in future campaigns, seeking to determine the most effective way to secure the unconditional surrender of the Axis powers. Following the Casablanca Conference, the participants recognized a shortage of sustaining forces following the initial invasions presented a significant challenge to overcome in North Africa, and this same issue could cause problems for upcoming operations.

Prior to Casablanca, American planners noted the early signs of a significant personnel shortage caused by the demands of conscripting soldiers, mass producing war material for new American units, and continuing Lend Lease to Great Britain and Russia. This personnel shortage began to have a dramatic effect on the size and quality of the Army Ground Forces (AGF) in

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[7] "Eisenhower to Patton," August 17, 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 2, Part VI, Chapter 12, "The Fall of Mussolini and the Surrender Negotiations" (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 1340-41; Robert Wilcox, *Target: Patton* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2008), 4; Albert Garland and Howard Smyth, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, The United States Army in World War II (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1986), 429-31. Eisenhower admonished Patton for repeated episodes of insubordination during the conduct of the Sicilian campaign. These episodes included withholding information on the fratricide incidents during the initial landing, the mistreatment of Sicilian locals, and US soldiers.

1943. The AGF had reduced its troop basis (planned number of divisions that it would mobilized to fight the war) because of a combination of limited personnel resources and production capacity. The Allied campaign plan had suffered from excessive focus on tactical forces to the detriment of sustainment activities.[8] This proved particularly problematic for a mechanized combat force fighting in such an austere environment. Upcoming campaigns would suffer similar shortcomings, due to national personnel shortages, not poor planning. Eisenhower, as the OPD (Operations Division) commander, learned the importance of logistics in modern warfare.[9]

While some commanders, like Eisenhower, understood the significance of logistics and the American personnel crisis of 1942, many did not, or at least did not seem to base on their recommendations and actions as the campaigns unfolded. In addition to recognizing shortfalls in sustainment planning, Allied planners also identified the need for increased emphasis on unity of command to improve responsiveness and integration of actions at both tactical and operational levels of war. While Eisenhower directed the overall execution of the North African campaign, a new organization emerged, commanded by a single ground commander to coordinate all Allied land forces even more efficiently and effectively. This arrangement provided the theater commander with single component commanders for land, sea, and air to streamline the delivery

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[8] Jim Lacey, *Keep from All the Thoughtful Men: How US Economists won World War II* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 9. Major Albert Wedemeyer, a junior member of the Army War Plans division helped to develop the Army's initial mobilization and production effort during WWII. After the personnel crisis of 1943, Wedemeyer played no role in the development of the updated victory plan, although he asserted that he did, according to Lacey. Robert Palmer, Bell Wiley, and William Keast, *The Army Ground Forces: The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops*, *The United States Army in World War II* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2003), 565.

[9] Michael R. Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy: American Operational Art to 1945* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 175.; Walter Bedell Smith, *Eisenhower's Six Great Decisions* (Toronto: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1956), 82; *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 5, "Eisenhower as Commander: Single Thrust versus Broad Front",43.

of capabilities across the battlefield. Though Eisenhower served as overall commander, British officers held each of these subordinate commands.[10] This arrangement fed the growing disdain that Patton held for the British and fed Patton's ambition to prove the Americans would fight just as well as their British Allies, if not better, illustrated by the manner in which he led his forces in Sicily and the race to Messina.[11]

Following Tunisia, planners failed to account for all of the issues that plagued Allied forces in North Africa, leading to the reoccurrences in later campaigns. Operation Husky and the invasion of Sicily fostered a continuation in the evolution of the Allied approach to the operational art that accounted for the complex nature of an amphibious assault over complex terrain. The assault was limited by the operational range of air cover initially based in Sicily. As Allied forces advanced, air cover would leapfrog forward to ensure coverage for the next series of operations. Forward movement of ground forces required the capture of airfields close enough to the front to facilitate continuous air cover; thus, fire and movement, always reinforcing at the tactical level, had become mutually dependent.[12] Operations in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, and Western Europe required the ability to conduct fire and movement in close coordination with air

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[10] Albert Garland and Howard Smyth, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Sicily and the Surrender of Italy, The United States Army in World War II* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1986), 55; "Eisenhower to the British Chiefs of Staff and Joint Chiefs of Staff" June 19, 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 2, Part V, Chapter 10, "A Period of Tenseness" 1199-1200; Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*, 177.

[11] Garland, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 59; Martin Blumenson and Kevin Hymel, *Patton: Legendary Commander* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2008), 54; Terry Brighton, *Patton, Montgomery, and Rommel: Masters of War: A Story of the Three Greatest Generals of the Greatest War* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2008), 18.

[12] Garland, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 58; John A. Olsen and Martin van Creveld, *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 148.

and sea power while under a unified command, laying the foundation of operational concepts that together comprised Allied operational art.

On September 1, 1944 Eisenhower as the SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces) commander assumed command of all ground forces in Western Europe. Derived from lessons learned during the North Africa and Sicily campaigns, as well as an assessment of Montgomery's ability, Eisenhower tailored his operational approach to make best use of means possessed by the various Allied forces. This led him to adopt a tempo focused more on close coordination than speed and audacity, aiming to defeat the Axis by operating along supporting lines of operation and applying steady concentric pressure against the enemy front. This approach, generally referred to as Eisenhower's broad front strategy, entailed controlling the tempo, while maintaining operational reach through careful management of logistics to support the tactical actions of the Allied ground forces. Eisenhower remained convinced after the successful breakout of Allied forces from Normandy that strict adherence to this theater strategy over time and space would eventually result in the defeat of the Germans, while exposing the Allies to the least possible risk posed by a still very capable enemy.[13]

The German defeat was essential to defining what the operational approach was and what was required from the operational artist to execute it. In 1945 it became clear the Allies would not win in Europe by employing bold and daring maneuvers like the thin, deep thrust attempted during Operation Market-Garden, a method favored by advocates of massed tank attacks, rapid maneuver, and the indirect approach advocated by theorist B. H. Liddell Hart and like-minded

[13] Roland G. Ruppenthal, "Logistics and the Broad-Front Strategy," in *Command Decisions*, ed. Kent Roberts Greenfield (Washington, DC, 1960), 419-28.; Timothy Lynch, "The Supreme Allied Commander's Operational Approach" (SAMS Monograph, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2014), 42.

operational commanders.[14] Eisenhower's approach to operational art involved a deliberate application of concentric pressure along a broad front enabled by superior intelligence, effective command and control, and logistics applied in a calculated and deliberate manner.[15] The Allied approach to operational art ran counter to what Patton viewed as the proper way to fight and win a war, sacrificing logistics and intelligence for speed and maneuver. Interestingly, Patton's views on warfare fit more comfortably within the mindset of a different army than his own.

Patton and the German Way of War

As Eisenhower began preparing to serve as the SHAEF commander, a divergence began to appear between the Allies' relatively conservative application of combat forces and Germany's culturally-driven warfare that emphasized bold, offensive action over considerations like sustainment and protection. Patton, a cavalryman at heart, preferred warfare characterized by emphasis on movement, firepower, daring, and aggressiveness, similar to that of the Germans. This contributed to Patton's reputation among the Germans, who described him as a bold and daring warrior in their own assessment of his performance in North Africa. Adolf Hitler reportedly referred to him as "that crazy cowboy general," likening him to the United States'

[14] Christopher Bassford, *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815-1945* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 129. Liddell Hart's emphasis of an indirect approach between the wars influenced British strategic thinking. As Bassford suggests, "[Hart's] overarching goal was to find some indirect way to strike at an enemy's strategic vitals, by passing his main strength and thus avoiding the head-to-head confrontation that had led to the bloodbaths of the Great War."

[15] "Eisenhower to Montgomery" August 24, 1944, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 4, Part VIII, Chapter 22, "Single Thrust versus Broad Front", 2090. Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*, 200.

version of Rommel.[16] Rommel likewise credited Patton with achieving the impossible in Tunisia following the Allies' defeat of the German Army in the campaign in North Africa. The German Army, however, never deviated from their offensive-minded approach to planning, always seeking the rapid and decisive operational stroke likely to meet with widespread approval among the commanders.[17] In the end, the Germans were fascinated with Patton because he was a mechanized tank centric warrior who believed in many of the tenets of the German conception of modern warfare during WWII, and embodied characteristics that the Germans admired in a commander.

Analysis of the German Army during WWII reveals overemphasis on tactical prowess, combined with a general lack of a holistic operational approach to warfare. This partly reflected neglect of key principles of large unit operations like logistics, while reflecting the effect of Hitler's direct control of German combat forces. As Shimon Naveh wrote, "Hitler's strategic logic was motivated by four principles: destruction, speed, aggressiveness, and opportunism."[18] While daring, this approach did not account for the constraints of environment and operational reach in Russia in 1941, or in North Africa from 1942 to 1943. The inability of the German Army to sustain operations over time and space limited its effectiveness, in turn making it difficult for Hitler to achieve his national strategic objectives.

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[16] Carlo D'este, *Patton: A Genius for War* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1995.), 815. Brighton, *Patton, Montgomery, and Rommel*, 22; Dennis Showalter, *Patton and Rommel: Men of War in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Berkley Caliber, 2005), 3.

[17] Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 278.

[18] Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997), 120.

The North Africa Campaign

Background

The American defeat suffered at Kasserine Pass in March 1943 embarrassed the United States—particularly its army and political leaders—and caused America's British allies and the American public to question the capabilities of American soldiers and leaders to fight effectively. Most people focused on the bad—the tactical defeats, the routed and panicking units. By the end of several days of fighting culminating in the Kasserine Pass battles, the Americans had lost approximately three thousand personnel either killed or wounded, forfeited over thirty seven hundred prisoners to the Germans, and lost about two hundred tanks.[19] Word of the poor performance of inexperienced American units in their first encounter with the Germans spread over Axis and Allied radio waves, leading to questions about the selection of Eisenhower as the Allied CINC (Commander in Chief), and leaving the British wary of their less experienced American allies. The American-led II Corps in particular displayed signs of an unwillingness to fight and an ineffective combat capability. Upon Marshall's decision to relieve Major General Lloyd Fredendall, the II Corps commander, Eisenhower and Major General Omar Bradley selected Patton to replace him, giving him the task of re-invigorating the corps.[20]

Patton, already identified as the Seventh US Army (SUSA) commander for the invasion of Sicily, did not let them down. His command, while brief, placed him in the spotlight,

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[19] George F. Howe et al., *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West, The United States Army in World War II* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1957), 470; H. Essame, *Patton: A Study in Command* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1974), 68.

[20] "Eisenhower to Patton," March 6, 1943, *The Papers of General Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 2, Part IV, Chapter 8, "The Tunisian Campaign", 1010-11. James Wellard, *General George S. Patton, Jr.: Man Under Arms* (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1946), 79; David A. Smith, *George S. Patton: A Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 80-81.

particularly following his successes in El Guettar and while supporting Montgomery in his march to Tunis. The turnaround of the II Corps also solidified his reputation for leadership at the tactical level and demonstrated his ability to instill fear in both his opponents and subordinates. The events in Tunisia also provided the source for his growing animosity towards Eisenhower, Bradley, and the British, including Alexander and the British Army's most famous officer, Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery. According to Gerhard L. Weinberg, "…ushering in two new American commanders (Patton and Bradley) would shape the course of history and achieve higher fame through very different ways."[21] The turnaround of the II Corps and its performance during the remainder of the campaign in North Africa demonstrated just that.

Narrative

The officers and soldiers of II Corps, still recovering from their recent indoctrination by fire, did not welcome Patton's arrival at the II Corps headquarters. His initial assessment was three of the four divisions (1st Armored, 1st Infantry, 9th Infantry, and 34th Infantry) suffered from an inferiority complex and the ineffective leadership of commanders who worried too much about casualties and not enough about achieving victory. Recognizing the need for rapid change to stop the downward spiral of the corps' morale, Patton focused his efforts on fixing the issues through dynamic leadership and personality.[22] Flair for the dramatic was nothing new for Patton who arrived at the II Corps headquarters standing erect in the lead of a motorcade, sirens blaring,

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[21] Gerhard Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 444.

[22] Howe, et al., *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 549; Stanley P. Hirshon, *General Patton: A Soldier's Life* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2002), 314; Showalter, *Patton and Rommel*, 301-2; Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943* (New York, NY; Henry Holt, 2002), 400-403.

and vehicles adorned with the latest automatic rifles.[23] He enforced a strict regimen of military customs and courtesies to include the wearing of leggings, ties, and helmets and implementing monetary fines for personnel not in compliance. Patton recorded in his diary, "if men do not obey small things they will not be capable of being led in battle." With Patton in command, II Corps prepared to conduct operations that would re-establish its credibility, providing support to Montgomery's Eighth Army as it approached Tunis from the south, by drawing the German tenth and twenty-first Panzer divisions away from his attack along the Mareth line. With the Germans controlling the eastern Dorsal Mountains bisecting Tunisia, it became obvious that II Corps would not rely on finesse during the upcoming Maknassy-El Guettar Campaign, planning a bold frontal attack focused on speed and daring.[24] However, for all of Patton's successes he had demonstrated little tactical imagination at Al Guettar, Maknassy, or the first Fondouk.

Having assumed command of the II Corps, Patton had ten days to muster a force of four divisions and over 88,000 troops to support the British Eighth Army in the west. Alexander ordered II Corps to conduct a two-pronged offensive to the east to ease the pressure from the German Tenth and Twenty First Panzer Armies. The attack required Patton to commit two divisions to operations designed to seize objectives along highways fourteen and fifteen (see Figure 1, Battle of El Guettar and Maknassy Pass). These battles exposed Patton's strengths and weaknesses, both in his service as a corps commander and tactician.

On March 17, 1943 the 1st Infantry Division, under the command of Major General Terry Allen, attacked and seized the town of Gafsa with little resistance. Immediately thereafter, the

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[23] Douglas Porch, *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in WWII* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004), 398.

[24] Howe, et al., *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 549; Wellard, *General George S. Patton, Jr.*, 91.

division pushed further south and east along highway fifteen through El Guettar. On March, 23rd the division came under attack from elements of the 10th Panzer Division. After a day of fighting, the 1st Infantry Division reduced the German's armor formations by a third and forced them to retreat. Patton, expecting a German counterattack, arrived in El Guettar for the battle escorted by a motorcade and a press corps stating, "I want a fight with the champ [Rommel]."[25] The following day he would receive just that, or so he thought. On the afternoon of March 24, 1943 remaining elements of the Tenth Panzer Army initiated a counterattack as expected, which the 1st Infantry Division again repelled, signaling a victory for Patton and his forces.[26]

Historians often view the battle of El Guettar as the first of many great battles in which Patton fought against a superior opponent under dire circumstances, such as in the press at the time, and more dramatically in the movie "Patton." With El Guettar, the Americans won a seminal victory, defeating a talented veteran foe that had terrorized opponents since the outbreak of the war in 1939. According to Patton's deputy, General Omar Bradley, this was "the first solid, indisputable defeat we inflicted on the German Army in the war."[27] When evaluating Patton's performance one must also be cognizant of the conditions surrounding the battle. The 1st Infantry Division had ample warning of a counterattack by an enemy reduced to sixty-five percent of its combat power. Patton's forces also benefited from the advantages of fighting from

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[25] D'Este, *Patton; A Genius for War*, 466; Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 434, 441; Douglas Porch, *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004), 466.

[26] Howe, et al., *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations, 550-1;* "Eisenhower to Alexander" March 23, 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower,* Volume 2, Part IV, Chapter 9, " Planning Husky: 'As always, we have to think in terms of ships.'" (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 1055-57.

[27] Howe, et al., *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations, 676;* Atkinson, *Army at Dawn*, 443.

prepared defensive positions, giving them a significant advantage in firepower and terrain. While II Corps achieved commendable success at El Guettar, the second element of Patton's two-pronged attack forty miles to the northeast did not fare so well.[28]

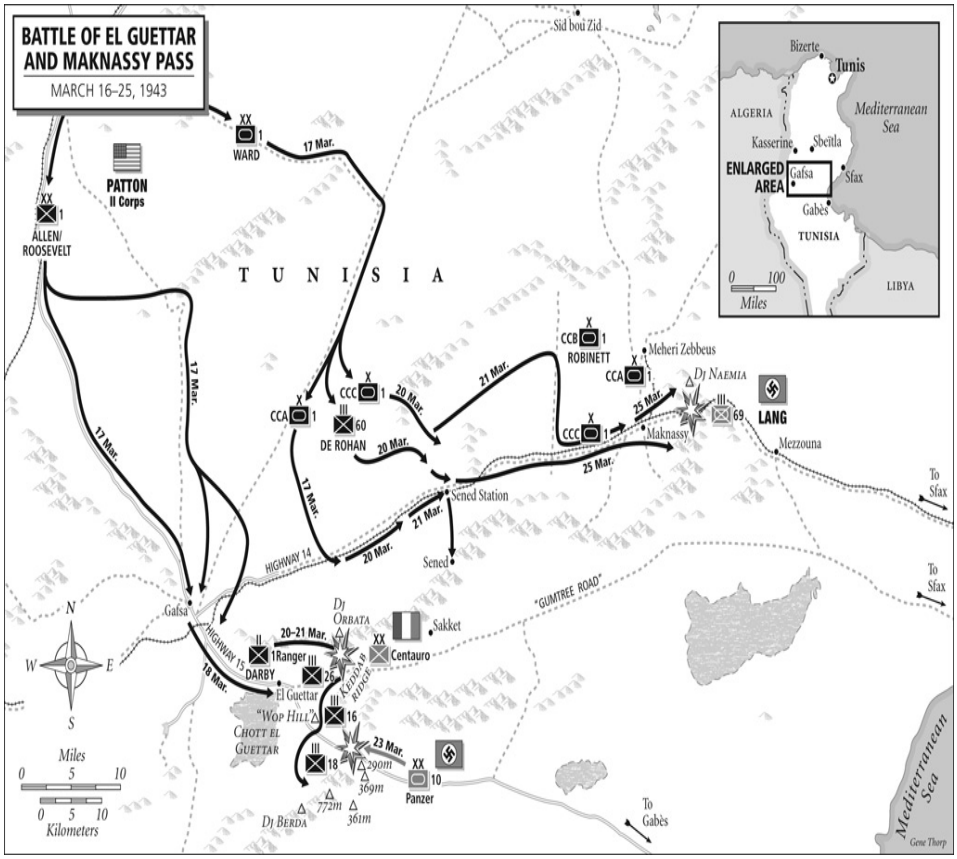

Figure 1. Battle of El Guettar and Maknassy Pass.

Source: Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 432.

The 1st Armored Division, commanded by Major General Orlando "Pink" Ward led the second element of the attack from the west to the east. Patton ordered the attack to coincide with the March 17, 1943 movement to Gafsa in an effort to support the western flank of the British

[28] Kelly, *Meeting the Fox*: 166-68; Howe, et al., *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 567-69.

Eighth Army, given his corp's primary mission of facilitating the success of the British drive north. Ward arrayed his forces well having seized the town of Sened and its railroad station to the west by the 21st. Considered by most a cautious commander, it took Ward an additional four days to seize the town of Maknassy just west of the key terrain of Maknassy heights. Patton remained in El Guettar reveling in his victory there, while elements of the German Army re-enforced Maknassy pass and occupied key terrain. Wanting complete access to the city of Sfax along highway fourteen, Patton ordered Ward to attack the night of the 25th to seize Maknassy Heights despite an assessment from Patton's own staff, who agreed with Ward that he would improve his chances of victory by consolidating his forces prior to beginning the attack (see Figure 1. Battle and El Guettar and Maknassy Pass). A combination of poor intelligence and a reduction in armored forces, temporarily reassigned to support the 1st Infantry Division in the south, prevented the 1st Armored Division from attacking the enemy in mass. All told, the Germans defeated three attempts to take the Maknassy heights over the course of the next twenty-four hours. By the evening of March 23rd, all attempts to seize the key terrain were repelled, and Patton verbally admonished Ward for lack of initiative, ordering Ward to take the hill and personally lead the charge. To his credit, Ward did pick up a carbine and attempt another assault on the hill only to suffer another failure while sustaining minor injuries in the process.[29] In the end, Ward lost the heights, the other key terrain in the vicinity, and the initiative. The Germans had once again defeated the Americans. Patton, as Ward's superior, did nothing to improve his chances of success. He did not provide additional forces, offer sound tactical advice, or encourage his subordinate, ignoring Ward's recommendations and those of his own staff to take more time to prepare for the attack before initiating it. Instead, Patton decorated Ward with a silver star for

[29] Martin Blumenson, *The Patton Papers: 1940-1945*, Vol.2., 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), 197-98; Howe, et al., *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 553-56; Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 449; Hirshon, *General Patton*, 442.

bravery, and ordered his deputy to relieve him of his division command two weeks later, on April 4, 1943.

The failure to seize the key terrain at Maknassy Heights meant that the II Corps could not open a second avenue of approach to reach the enemy's rear. In order to support Montgomery's approach from the south and enable him to maintain his momentum, Patton repositioned the 9th Infantry Division from the north planning an attack from the north, against the German forces positioned east of El Guettar along highway fifteen. Patton, however, developed a flawed plan to carry out this attack. He chose not to attack along highway fifteen where mobile forces could maneuver quickly through the passes and conduct a penetration. Instead, he split his forces, attacking along a ten mile front with troops moving on rough terrain to the north and south of the highway. Lacking air support, accurate maps, and intelligence, the Ninth Infantry Division under the command of Major General Manton S. Eddy attempted multiple failed attacks to the south resulting in a tongue-lashing from Patton. Commanders soon learned that only action would prevent a berating by Patton, often leading them to conduct poorly planned and coordinated attacks. North of highway fifteen, the 1st Armored Division did not fare much better, simply conducting ill-advised frontal attacks against the battle hardened Germans. Finally, recognizing the need to adjust the plan, Patton ordered a concentration of forces along the highway, hoping to penetrate through the mountain passes. This plan merely resulted in a stalemate that lasted more than a week. However, by April 6th the attack had achieved its objective, tying up German forces while Monty broke through the Mareth line and began moving to the north. II Corps attacks resulted in the diversion of two panzer divisions from the German defenses along the Mareth line; however, attacks leading up to Monty's break through did not come without a price. Eddy lost over ten percent of his combat forces and more than eighteen hundred casualties. Patton achieved a tactical victory, but in an archaic manner leveraging attritional style tactics, while encouraging similarly unimaginative behavior in his subordinate commanders.

Three of the four divisions of Patton's II Corps had achieved their military objectives in the south during the battles around El Guettar and Maknassy. The fourth of his divisions, commanded by Major General Charles Ryder, repositioned to support the British IX Corps in Northern Tunisia as it prepared to attack Germans defending in Fondouk. Meanwhile, Patton directed the rest of his corps in the fighting on March 25th in El Guettar. The "first Fondouk" occurred with poor intelligence, little air support, and no clearly defined objective. Patton ordered the 34th Division to "go out in that area and make a lot of noise, but don't try to capture anything."[30] Under British command, the division went out and did just that, capturing nothing at a cost of over five hundred casualties.[31] Patton viewed the division, composed mostly of national guardsmen from the Midwest, as the weakest of the four under his command. Sending the 34th Division into battle without an unclear objective and limited air assets assumed a great deal of tactical and operational risk. Only after extensive losses did Patton recognize that he would have to commit a much larger force to take the Fondouk Pass, which he finally captured on April 9, 1943.[32]

Analysis

During Patton's forty-three days in command of the II Corps, the units achieved overall success and achieved the first major American victory against the Germans. Eisenhower, under pressure to produce results after the embarrassing defeat at Kasserine Pass and to re-establish the United States' reputation as a viable force in support of the British in North Africa, counted on Patton to deliver, and to the casual observer it appeared that he did. Although credited with this

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[30] Howe, et al., *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 582; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers* Vol. 2, 211.

[31] Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 468; Hirshon, *General Patton*, 336.

[32] For additional information on II Corps' actions in Gafsa, Maknassay, and El Geuttar see Howe, et al., *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 543-76.

magical turnaround, closer analysis of Patton's actions reveal that at the troop and tactical level he achieved some successes, particularly in bolstering unit discipline and morale, but as a commander of large-scale combat operations Patton lacked imagination and had difficulty coordinating distributed operations. The attack and seizure of Gafsa and El Guettar were unremarkable in that both operations occurred following extensive planning by the II Corps staff, both having been approved by Alexander and Eisenhower, leaving Patton to simply execute the plan. Additionally, Rommel correctly anticipated the advance along the major avenues of approach from west to east and repositioning the majority of his forces to the eastern slope of the Dorsal Mountains. By establishing defensive positions on the reverse slope of the mountains, Rommel left only the beleaguered Italian reserves to face the overwhelming firepower of the Americans. The taking of Gafsa-El Guettar in the south and Sened-Maknassay objective to the north was simply a movement to contact met with little resistance lacking the sweeping fire and maneuver indicative of a Patton-led armor force. Ironically, Rommel's misguided counterattack would make Patton famous following the Battle of El Guettar casting a shadow of success after weeks of defeat.[33]

As the Tunisian campaign came to an end, Patton had neither achieved a significant defeat of German forces nor faced Rommel in combat, Rommel having redeployed back to Germany because of poor health before the Battles of El Guettar and Maknassy. Further, Patton had not forced a German retreat; the German leadership decided to conduct retrograde operations after Montgomery's success at Mareth, repositioning to better defensive terrain farther north.

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[33] Howe, et al., *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 519. Patton's arch rival was no longer present in Tunisia during the battle of El Guettar and Maknassy. Suffering from poor health Rommel returned to Germany to restore his health. Patton had mistakenly believed he was fighting Rommel. However, he would learn later that he was fighting forces Rommel trained, but not Rommel himself. Historians refer to this as fighting the "phantom Rommel." D'Este, *Patton*, 466; Showalter, *Patton and Rommel*, 281-82.

Nevertheless, the Associated Press would never change its stance when the Americans and Eisenhower needed a victory to rally behind. In fact, most American press outlets devoted a great deal of coverage to Patton, whose entourage reportedly consisted of forty-nine correspondents feeding headlines to publications and radio shows in the United States. The War Department eventually produced large posters reading, "OLD BLOOD AND GUTS ATTACKS ROMMEL! Go forward..always go forward..go until the last shot is fired and the last drop of gas is gone and then go forward on foot."[34] The press either did not know or chose not to report what some of his subordinates thought about their commander's performance, indicated by one officer's assessment of Patton: "[he] lacked a fundamental understanding of logistics, failed to establish a working relationship with the air force and the British" and ". . . was a fighter and a tactician . . . and that's as far as I can go."[35]

Eisenhower reassigned Patton on April 15, 1943 to oversee the planning of the invasion of Sicily, which alleviated some of the Anglo–American tension.[36] The II Corps performed well under its new commander, Major General Omar Bradley, eventually taking part in a combined effort to push the remaining Germans out of Tunis, although the press, less impressed by Bradley, credited this success primarily to the British. As Montgomery basked in the victory, Patton learned that Rommel was not in Tunisia during any of the battles he led, leaving him with a damaged ego and an unquenched thirst for victory over "the champ." Lastly, the friction between Eisenhower and Montgomery increased as the commanders jointly planned for Operation Husky and the invasion of Sicily.

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[34] Brighton, *Patton, Montgomery, Rommel*: *Masters of War*, 184.

[35] Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 408; Hirshon, *Patton*, 335.

[36] "Eisenhower to Marshall," April 15, 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 2, Part IV, Chapter 9, "Planning Husky: As always, we have to think in terms of ships", 945-46; Howe, et al., *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 608.

The Sicily Campaign

Background

During the Casablanca Conference (January 14-24, 1943), Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt agreed to the next major Allied campaign after completing the capture of Tunisia from Axis forces—the invasion of Sicily. The Americans remained suspicious that the invasion of Sicily, code named Husky, might lead to a long-term commitment to operations in the Mediterranean that would delay America's goal of invading Northwest Europe by a year, delaying the amphibious assault of French beaches, which the Americans had long sought to conduct in 1943, by a full year, to the spring of 1944 at the earliest. While the Americans appeared to support this goal of a 1943 mainland invasion, Author Jim Lacey argues by the time the Americans met with their British allies at Casablanca, they knew they possessed neither the personnel nor the equipment resources necessary to accomplish a landing in 1943, and therefore agreed to the continuation of operations in the Mediterranean much less reluctantly than they led Britain's leaders (and later generations of historians) to believe.[37] The American leadership, however, did desire to limit their commitment to other operations in order to begin marshalling the resources needed for a landing in Western Europe in 1944, insisting on limited aims for Husky: securing the Mediterranean lines of communications, diverting German divisions from the Soviet Union, and detaching Italy from Germany.[38]

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[37] Lacey, *Keep From All Thoughtful Men*, 117. During America's first year in the war, Marshall strongly advocated an Allied cross-Channel invasion in 1943. Many historians have accepted that during the Casablanca Conference, Marshall opposed further operations in Mediterranean and continued to push for a decisive invasion of Northern Europe in 1943. However, upon assessing the effects of the manpower crisis of 1943 in America, Lacey demonstrated that Marshall knew before Casablanca that America could not support a cross-Channel invasion until 1944, and therefore accepted that the Allies' best strategy remained a continuation of operations in the Mediterranean until the spring of 1944.

[38] Albert Garland and Howard Smyth, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, *The United States Army in World War II* (Washington DC: Center of

The Allies agreed and tentatively planned D-day for Operation Husky in July 1943, with an invasion force consisting of the US Seventh Army (the Western Task Force) led by Patton, and the British Eighth Army (the Eastern Task Force), led by Montgomery. Both task forces would remain under the direction of Alexander and the Fifteenth Army Group, again placing Patton under a British commander. Following the contribution of the II Corps in Tunisia one would have thought that the Combined Joint Chiefs would have considered giving the Americans a more prominent role during the invasion of Sicily and eventual capture of its key port of Messina, both in the command structure and the missions of each nation's forces. As it stood, the British would once again control the Sicilian campaign and serve as the main effort, with Montgomery's Eighth Army attacking along the east coast to take Messina, relegating Patton to the supporting role of protecting Montgomery's western flank yet again.[39]

Patton bristled at the thought of assuming a secondary role to Montgomery (and at operating under Alexander as overall commander) following the campaign in Tunisia. Patton allowed his personal ambitions, from the landing on July 10th to the seizure of Messina thirty-eight days later, to cloud his judgment once engaged with the enemy. The Sicilian Campaign would demonstrate Patton's skill as a leader and tactical commander, while simultaneously illustrating his inability to conduct himself appropriately as a member of a combined task force through his actions from the landing, to the movement to Sicily's second largest city of Palermo, and finally through the one hundred forty seven mile attack to seize Messina. Fueled by his

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Military History, 1986), 12-13; John Keegan, *Atlas of World War II* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2006), 112; "Eisenhower to Marshall" April 19, 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 2, Part IV, Chapter 9, "Planning Husky: As always, we have to think in terms of ships", 1095-97.

[39] Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 420; "Eisenhower to Patton" June 4, 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 2, Part V, Chapter 10, "A Period of Tenseness", 1173-75; Garland and Smyth, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 59.

personal desires to the beat the British, at whatever cost, Patton nearly ruined his career, while possibly sacrificing more American lives than necessary and further driving a wedge between the American and British allies.[40]

Narrative

On July 10th the Americans landed in Sicily's Gulf of Gela. As Montgomery requested, the force now consisted of a total of seven divisions, four British and three American.[41] The Allies sought to achieve initial division objectives along the Yellow Line marking a secure beachhead Demarcation ten to thirty miles from the coast while forcing enemy artillery to retreat beyond engagement range of captured airfields. In addition to the American amphibious assault force, Patton planned a night airborne raid during which more than three thousand airborne soldiers would secure vital road junctions and prevent an Axis counterattack on the coast (See Figure 2). Although training jumps that matched this size and scale, conducted in Tunisia in preparation for Husky proved unsuccessful, leading to their curtailment to prevent unnecessary training casualties, the operation went forward. It ended in catastrophic failure. In the first hours of the attack, less than one sixth of the airborne forces landed in their designated landing zones. Poor training, planning, and execution led to the loss of eight aircraft.[42] Unfortunately, this

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[40] For more information on the Seventh Army's plans for Husky see Albert Garland and Howard Smyth, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, *The United States Army in World War II* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1986), 96-105, 425-31; "Eisenhower to Marshall" March 12, 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 2, Part IV, Chapter 9, "Planning Husky" 1036.

[41] Samuel W. Mitchum Jr. and Friedrich von Stauffenberg, *The Battle of Sicily* (New York, NY: Orion Books, 1991), 13; "Eisenhower to Somervell" March 19, 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 2, Part IV, Chapter 9, "Planning Husky: As always, we have to think in terms of ships" 1044.

[42] Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 74-75; Ed Ruggero, *Combat Jump: The Young Men who led the Assault into Fortress Europe* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2003), 2-3.

airborne operation would not be the last example of a poorly coordinated and executed action requiring air, land, and sea coordination and cooperation.

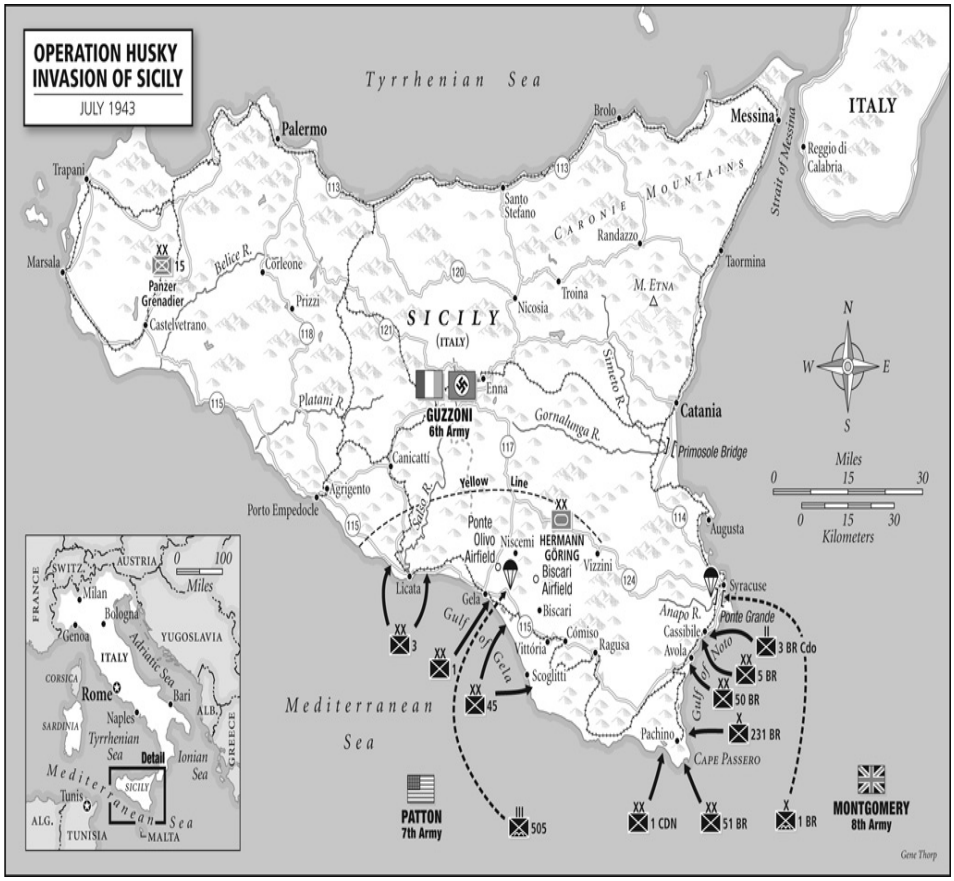

Figure 2. Operation Husky and the Invasion of Sicily

Source: Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 74.

Patton came ashore at Gela receiving little resistance. His three divisions began operations to seize their division objectives along the Yellow Line. Patton still harbored ill feelings about the poor coordination of air support under the control of the Royal Air Force. Both Patton and Admiral Hewitt anticipated such problems because of the complete lack of the air forces' participation in the planning of the invasion and their lack of willingness to provide close air support to ground troops. This autonomous behavior by the Royal Air Force plagued Patton

for the rest of the campaign. The lack of communication across the invading force formations led to a second doomed airborne assault, this one by the 82nd Airborne Division which sought to reinforce Major General Terry Allen's First Infantry Division.[43]

On July 11, 1943 paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division jumped from 144 aircraft to reinforce the 1st Infantry Division.[44] With German forces in retreat, some planners advocated for a daylight jump or simply landing the C47s on the secured airfields near the beach to discharge the soldiers. Patton decided to continue the airborne drop, while seeking to minimize risk by issuing an order before the night jump to his division commanders to take measures not to fire on incoming friendly aircraft.[45] However, backlog of communications, jumpy antiaircraft personnel, and the challenges of nighttime aircraft identification led to disaster and fratricide. Some of the 45th Division's anti-aircraft crews had not received the advance warning and Patton apparently did nothing to determine whether they had. Ridgway had warned of fratricide during planning and recommended cancelling the jump because the Navy had refused to guarantee safe passage of his planes over sea-lanes.[46] Still, Patton went on with the airborne operation. As the first C47 arrived east of Gela a single shot of anti-aircraft fire from the 45th Division opened the floodgates. Twenty-three planes fell from the sky, with an additional thirty-seven damaged. Four days later, on July 16, the commander of the 82nd Airborne Division could account for only

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[43] Garland and Smyth, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 91; "Eisenhower to British Chiefs of Staff and Joint Chiefs of Staff" June 19, 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 2, Part V, Chapter 10, "A Period of Tenseness" (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 1199-1200.

[44] Garland and Smyth, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations:* 174.

[45] Blumenson, *The Patton Papers Vol.* 2, 282; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 107-9; Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 424.

[46] Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 78; Garland, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 144; D'este, *Patton*, 506. Garland, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 488; Ed Ruggero, *Combat Jump*, 190.

3,900 of the 5,300 paratroopers that jumped. Patton had made a crucial and avoidable error by deciding to proceed with the operation. Canceling the jump and allowing the forces to land during daylight on secured airfields would have allowed for twelve additional hours of coordination and reduced the risk of both pilot and coastal defense error. The lack of flexibility and common sense led to one of the worst friendly fire episodes in modern warfare history. Ignoring the well-known adage that bad news does not get better with time, Patton did not inform Eisenhower of the incident when he visited the beaches to assess the situation, for fear of admitting to his poor judgment, and possibly finding himself relieved. Eisenhower did not learn of the incident until he had returned to his headquarters.[47] Patton's withholding of this information reinforced Eisenhower's concerns about his capability and added to his preference for Bradley over Patton as a more reliable, honest, and trustworthy subordinate. Before the July 5th attack in Algiers, Eisenhower told Patton, "George, you are a great leader, but a poor planner."[48]

As Patton's forces occupied portions of the southern beachhead, he again refused to wait for Montgomery's forces to make their approach up the eastern coast and capture Messina, and with it all of the glory. To Patton, only Eisenhower's lack of initiative to ensure American success and Alexander's favoritism for Montgomery prevented the US Army from performing on par with the British.[49] Patton sought both to earn glory for himself and prove the capability of

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[47] "Eisenhower to Alexander," July 12, 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 3, Part V, Chapter 11, "Sicily and Beyond–'nibbling and jabbing", 1114-15.

[48] Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 61. Patton's actions in Sicily placed Eisenhower in a difficult position in assessing whether or not the incidents warranted relieving Patton as the Seventh Army commander. He knew that Patton was impulsive, crass, and emotional during the incidents. He did not want to get rid of the general "who had commanded an army in one of our country's most successful operations" and who is the best ground gainer developed so far by the Allies. General Eisenhower concluded that Patton was too valuable a man to lose, and he determined to keep him in command of Seventh Army.

[49] D'Este, *Patton*, 489; Hirshon, *Patton*, 364.

American combat troops by capturing all of Western Sicily and the city of Palermo. While Patton flew to Tunisia on July 17, 1943 to brief Alexander on his plan, it remains uncertain whether he received approval from Alexander, however, historians generally agree that Alexander viewed the capture of Western Sicily as having little tactical significance. Patton, of course, had a different purpose in mind than achieving a significant tactical victory. He sought to display the speed and maneuverability of his forces.[50]

Patton did achieve tactical success during the advance to Palermo, however, the operation had many flaws. Once again, Patton's and his staff's poor logistical planning hampered movement of supplies, while air-ground coordination suffered because of the lack of a centralized command and control apparatus. Furthermore, sunken ships blocked Palermo's harbor, preventing ship to shore resupply of Bradley's II Corps. Most egregious of all, Patton neglected his primary mission of supporting Monty's western flank during his offensive to the north, giving the Germans ample time to strengthen their defenses around Mount Etna. Patton's actions further annoyed Eisenhower, who increasingly viewed Patton as self-serving, and saw Bradley as the best man to lead US forces during the invasion of Western Europe.[51] The only positive result from the capture of Western Sicily came in the form of many captured, demoralized Italian troops, and the release of Italian citizens from Axis control.[52] With Palermo seized and

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[50] Garland and Smyth, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations:* 236; Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 437; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 130-33; John N. Rickard, *Patton at Bay: The Lorraine Campaign, September to December, 1944* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, 1993), 24.

[51] Ladislas Farago, *Patton: Ordeal and Triumph* (London: Arthur Baker, 1966), 176; "Eisenhower to Marshall", August 24, 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 2, Part VI, Chapter 12, "The Fall of Mussolini and the Surrender Negotiations", 1353.

[52] Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier's Story* (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 1951), 142; Garland and Smyth, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 255.

Montgomery locked in a slow-moving, pitched battle along the eastern coast, Patton's vision turned east as he set his sights on the capture of Messina. On July 26th, he confided to his subordinates that "he would certainly like to beat Montgomery to Messina."[53] Patton's actions in the coming days to achieve his personal goal demonstrated just how far he would go to secure glory for himself and American forces, whatever the impact on Allied coordination and cooperation.

By mid-July Alexander could see that Montgomery's Eighth Army needed help, issuing a revised plan on July 23rd allowing Patton's forces to attack from Palermo east to Messina along two main avenues of approach.[54] The 3rd Division would advance east along highway 113, hugging the northern coast, while the 1st Division would advance along highway 120, seeking to disrupt German forces along Montgomery's western flank reducing the amount of forces they could mass against Monty's advance. With the two Armies too far apart to provide mutual support, combined with the difficult terrain and active German defenses, Patton's SUSA suffered through a slow advance. According to Bradley, the slow progress exposed Patton's weaknesses as a commander, causing him to micromanage operations because of his focus on speed rather than detailed planning and organization.[55] An inability to achieve rapid success caused Patton to order the 3rd Division commander, Major General Lucian Truscott, to execute an amphibious "end run" against German positions along the axis of advance to Messina. When this mission failed to achieve its objectives, Patton ordered a nearly identical repeat. All told, Patton ordered Truscott

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[53] Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 135.

[54] Garland and Smyth, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 256, 304; Rikard, *Patton at Bay*, 24; Hirshon, *General Patton*, 388-89.

[55] Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General's Life: An Autobiography by General of the Army Omar N. Bradley* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 199.

to attempt three of these end runs, with limited air support, few troops, and hasty planning, they amounted to no more than commando raids, placing a small contingent of US troops behind German lines with little air support.[56] With casualties mounting for Patton he began to demonstrate poor judgment as his forces advanced west to Messina. His actions were only compounded due to his inability to master to extend his lines of operations and array forces in manner suitable to support sustained combat operations.

Allied forces faced significant logistics and medical support shortcomings during Operation Husky. The lack of medical support that American soldiers faced resulted at least in part from Patton's inattention to logistics and medical support planning. A combat force that totaled over 200,000 personnel possessed a mere 3,300 hospital beds, limited medical supplies, and minimal transport vehicles.[57] Patton's decision to push to Messina prior to establishing a robust logistics node in Palermo hampered his forces ability to sustain lines of operations to the east. Food, water, and ammunition were often in short supply or misallocated. An inability to recognize and capitalize on the existing infrastructure was indicative of Patton's view taking inadequate measures in support of ground operations. In the words of Rick Atkinson in *The Day of Battle* "meticulous and even finicky in his warfighting, Patton was casual to the point of indifference about the more prosaic elements of running an army as logistics snarled repeatedly in Sicily."[58] Disregard for logistical and medical support may have contributed to the high number of soldiers suffering from combat fatigue.

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[56] Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 158-159; Garland and Smyth, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 320; D'este, *Patton*, 526; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 163-64.

[57] Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 144; Garland, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 419.

[58] Garland and Smyth, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 419; Martin Blumenson, *Patton: The Man Behind the Legend* (New York, NY: William Morrow Publishing, 1985), 206.

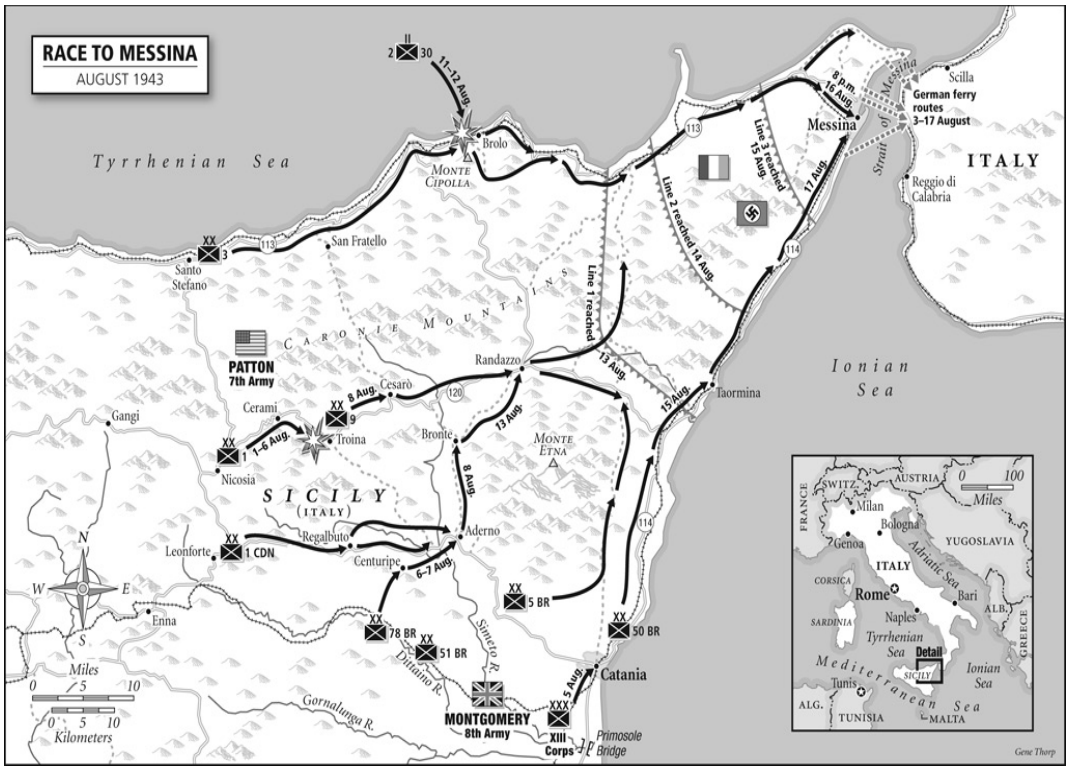

Figure 3. Race to Messina

Source: Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2007) 166.

As Patton's forces moved closer to Messina, the German forces executed a well-coordinated withdrawal that the Allies could do little to disrupt. On August 17th, Patton arrived in Messina to take his victory march and accept the surrender of the city. Meanwhile, 55,000 German and 70,000 Italian soldiers and much of their equipment escaped to the Italian mainland.[59] Patton achieved his goal of beating Montgomery to Messina, but not without tarnishing his reputation and demonstrating various significant flaws in his ability to command at the large unit, operational level.

[59] Garland and Smyth, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 423; Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 444; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 168-70.

Analysis

Patton emerged as the hero of Husky in the American popular media. His profile adorned the covers of both *Time* and *Newsweek* after his capture of Palermo.[60] However, in the process of capturing Palermo, Patton displayed recklessness, poor judgment, and the tendency to fuel his personal desire for glory with the paranoid conviction that the Allies designed war plans in North Africa and Sicily to make the British Army look superior to the Americans. Fundamentally, Patton demonstrated an inability to rise above the level of tactical proficiency to that of an operational artist. He demonstrated a lack of command and control during his march to Palermo, seen in factors including limited close air support for his ground forces, fratricide during unnecessary and risky airborne landings, and under resourced amphibious operations along Sicily's east coast. After Palermo as the pace of operations slowed, Patton simply ignored logistics opting to focus on his personal approach to warfare and simultaneously disregarded current doctrine.

Patton, a devout believer in the revolutionary capabilities of the tank, and the use of them in large, independent tank formations shaped his decisions. He developed his ideas about tanks under the influence of various interwar theorists of tank warfare, particularly B.H. Liddell Hart, who advocated breaking the front lines of the enemy with overwhelming tank centric maneuver warfare.[61] Unfortunately this failed to align with the existing American doctrine and its combined arms approach; this thinking also shared little in common with today's elements of operational art. The American approach to combined arms evolved over the decades between the world wars, as expressed primarily in the *Field Service Regulations* (FSR) of 1923, 1939, and 1941. In

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[60] Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 143; Hirshon, *General Patton*, 411. Mitcham, *The Battle of Sicily*, 294; Wellard, *General George S. Patton*, 122; Smith, *George S. Patton*, 91.

[61] Blumenson, *The Patton Papers* Vol. 2, 10.

essence, the 1923 FSR outlined the use of the combatant arms with an infantry focus stating "The special missions of other arms are derived from their powers contribute to the execution of the infantry mission."[62] As warfare technology advanced, doctrine updates reduced emphasis on the infantry, instead employing all arms in synchrony to achieve the military objective. First expressed in the 1939 FSR, this combined approach matured during the mobilization for war. This led to a clear description of the US Army's combined arms approach in the 1941 FSR: "No one arm wins battles. The combined action of all arms and services is essential to success."[63] Correspondence with the commander of army ground forces, Lieutenant General Lesley McNair, demonstrates that Patton applied his own version of maneuver warfare against the enemy, relying on an armor-centric approach with tanks fighting independently and in massed formations, until he finally saw the wisdom of combined arms in April, 1944.[64] Again, Patton's personal desires and flawed understanding of current doctrine clouded his judgment, placed a heavier burden on logistics support, wasted valuable materiel, and fed his growing frustration and tension between what he wanted to do and what his forces and personnel could accomplish.

His frustration with his subordinates' slow progress revealed deep seated personal character flaws that proved particularly damaging to his ability to command both in Sicily, and in later campaigns. In the final days of the Sicilian campaign, Eisenhower ordered Patton to apologize to his soldiers; as Patton put it when addressing his troops, "for any occasions when I

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[62] United States War Department, *1923 Field Service Regulations (FSR), Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1923), 11.

[63] United States War Department, *Field Manual (FM) 100-5, Field Service Regulations* (FSR) *Operations* (1941) (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941), 5.

[64] Lesley J. McNair, "Kent Roberts Greenfield, Notes from Letter, "Lesley J. McNair to George S. Patton," September 28, 1942, National Archives and Research Administration, College Park, MD (NARA 2), RG 319, Box 129, Folder 2.

may have harshly criticized individuals."[65] In addition to the famous slapping incidents, Patton's personal conduct during the Sicilian campaign led to several controversies. When Alexander sent a message limiting Patton's attack on Messina, his chief of staff claimed the message did not arrived at Patton's headquarters, apparently "lost in transmission" until Messina had fallen. Shortly thereafter, Patton shot and killed a pair of mules blocking the way of a US armored column along the coastal road. When their Sicilian owner protested, Patton attacked him with a walking stick and pushed the two mules off the bridge.[66] Later, when informed of the massacre of Italian prisoners by troops under his command, Patton showed little concern, writing in his diary, "I told Bradley that it was probably an exaggeration, but in any case to tell the officer to certify that the dead men were snipers or had attempted to escape or something, as it would make a stink in the press and also would make the civilians mad. Anyhow, they are dead, so nothing can be done about it."[67]

In sum, Patton's conduct in Sicily led Eisenhower to choose Bradley to lead American ground forces during Operation Overlord, the invasion of Western Europe in 1944. Some historians have argued that this led to missed opportunities in Western Europe.[68] Only time would tell if the patient, thoughtful, and reserved Bradley, versus the bombastic Patton, could lead forces in accordance with Eisenhower's often criticized broad front strategy.

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[65] Garland, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 426-31; "Eisenhower to Patton" August 17, 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 2, Part VI, Chapter 12, "The Fall of Mussolini and the Political Negotiations", 1340.

[66] Alan Axelrod, *Patton: A Biography* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillen, 2006), 107; James Wellard, *General George S. Patton Jr.: Man Under Mars* (New York, NY: Dodd Mead and Company, 1946), 124.

[67] Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 119.

[68] Stanley P. Hirshon, *General Patton: A Soldier's Life* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2002), 409-13.

In early May 1944, SHAEF planners developed the operational design for post-Normandy operations to best apply lessons learned in previous campaigns and take advantage of the strengths of Allied combat organizations and equipment. Eisenhower first announced his intent to pursue a broad front advance after the Normandy landings, providing SHAEF a framework that described how the Allies would achieve their military objectives in Europe. This broad front strategy, proved appropriate to the situation the Allies faced on the Western Front in the final campaigns to secure the unconditional surrender of Germany, particularly by managing the tempo of the Allied advance while minimizing risk. This concept took advantage of Allied air superiority and the plentiful American artillery in support of maneuver while strengthening logistical lines of communications to enable Allied forces to maintain a reasonable tempo while avoiding culmination despite limited supply throughput.[69] The decision to array his forces along multiple lines of operation ensured these lines of communication remained viable during the rest of the campaign because it maximized Allied strengths by providing his forces with the best opportunity to apply their resources in mutually supporting operations while preventing an Allied salient from developing, which would expose the Allies to the risk of still dangerous German defensive forces massing their forces and achieving a breakthrough.[70] Eisenhower's preference for slowing down and maintaining a coherent Allied line along the entire front to ensure logistical support and minimize risk was not congruent with Patton's view of modern warfare.

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[69] "Eisenhower to Marshall," June 20, 1944, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 3, Part VIII, Chapter 19, "Single Thrust versus Broad Front", 1937; Walter Bedell Smith, *Eisenhower's Six Great Decisions* 70-73; Timothy Lynch, "The Supreme Allied Commander's Operational Approach" (SAMS Monograph, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2014), 9-11.

[70] Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*, 200; *Rick Atkinson, The Guns at Last Light: the War in Western Europe, 1944-1945* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2013), 375.

Western European Campaign

Background

Following the conclusion of Husky, Eisenhower faced a dilemma with respect to Patton. Given the reputation that he had established on the home front, among US Army personnel (many of whom saw him as highly effective even if they disliked his personality and leadership style), and among the Germans, who saw him as America's best general, Eisenhower could not afford to lose him. On the other hand, he knew that he had to discipline Patton both in response to criticism of Patton over his actions in Sicily, and to deter similar behavior in the future.[71] Eisenhower began this process by selecting Bradley to take command of the First United States Army (FUSA), currently in England, preparing for Operation Overlord and the invasion of Normandy. Eisenhower made this decision before the slapping incidents being made public and for reasons related more to Patton's combat performance than these lapses of judgment. The media attention over the slapping incidents, however, merely gave Patton a convenient excuse for his not being selected to command during Overlord.[72] In fact, both Eisenhower and Marshall believed Patton possessed unique skill as a combat commander, and they believed that they would need him to command again before the war ended. They did not, however, wish to take unnecessary risks during the already highly complex Operation Overlord, such as those that an unpredictable leader like Patton might cause. On January 26, 1944, Patton took command of the newly arrived Third United States Army (TUSA) in England to prepare its inexperienced soldiers for combat in Europe. This duty kept Patton busy in early 1944 preparing for the pending invasion. While

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[71] "Eisenhower to Marshall," October, 23, 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 3, Part VI, Chapter 13, "Avalanche", 1358-59; D'Este, *Patton*, 543; Martin Blumenson, *The Patton Papers* Vol. 2, 341.

[72] Blumenson, *The Patton Papers* Vol. 2, 341; D'Este, *Patton*, 585; Hirshon, *General Patton*, 404; Smith, *George S. Patton*, 95;

Patton did not command TUSA in combat for eleven more months, he did prove useful to the Allied command in other ways.

The Germans still considered Patton central to any planned invasion to mainland Europe. Because of their awareness of this German perception, the Allies made Patton the commander of the imaginary First US Army Group (FUSAG) in an elaborate deception operation begun in early 1944, code named Operation Fortitude.[73] While a purely imaginary combat organization, the Allies devoted a great deal of effort to make FUSAG seem real, from signals traffic and vehicle movement to various espionage efforts. By keeping Patton in England, preparing with the TUSA staff for combat on the continent while playing the role of FUSAG commander Patton made a significant contribution to the successful execution of Overlord. Nevertheless, sidelined in England while other commanders conducted perhaps the most daring and important amphibious invasion in history, Patton seethed with dissatisfaction and repeatedly requested assignment to combat duty in Western Europe.[74] After nearly a year since his last command of troops in combat Patton finally deployed to France in command of TUSA, serving under General Omar Bradley, his former subordinate.

Narrative

On August 1, 1944, Patton's TUSA joined General Omar Bradley's 12th Army Group, operating on Bradley's right flank, and therefore the extreme right flank of the Allied land forces. Patton's operations still looked much like they had in North Africa and Sicily—he favored speed,

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[73] Carlo D'Este, *Decision In Normandy* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, 1983), 107; Martin Blumenson, *The European Theater of Operations: Breakout and Pursuit*, *The United States Army in World War II* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2005), 32; *Atkinson, The Guns at Last Light*, 26-27.

[74] Blumenson, *Patton*, 219-23; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers* Vol. 2, 480; Essame, *Patton at Bay*, 116.

mobility, and aggressive offensive action. Perhaps having learned some lessons in Sicily, Patton integrated a robust intelligence capability and air-ground coordination assets into his standard scheme of maneuver. The integration of an intelligence staff for the sole purpose of coordinating air strikes to cover his armored columns worked well.[75] This coordination and integration technique proved critical in the support of his rapidly advancing forces. By employing the latest technology to ensure responsive close air support, Patton's forces soon emerged as masters of combined arms maneuver. However, Patton continued to reveal a significant weakness in his neglect of a key enabler for sustained offensive operations. Never particularly skilled at planning adequate logistics support for operations, Patton continued to show weaknesses in this area, which soon developed into a major point of friction with his higher headquarters.

In its advance to Argentan, TUSA covered sixty miles in just two weeks, requiring extensive logistical support. TUSA's G4 emphasized flexibility, improvisation, and adaptation in logistics efforts to enable forward units to conduct sustained operations and exploit breakthroughs rapidly.[76] With little resistance from a weakened German force, and capturing large swaths of land, Patton seemed to be in his element. This did not last long, as significant delays in securing key logistics bases during and after Operation Overlord made logistics a limiting factor for the Allied forces. This situation tested Patton's ability to quell his personal desire for glory and demonstrate operational patience as the entire Allied operation risked culmination because of these significant sustainment limitations.

Patton's movement to the east ground to a standstill as the TUSA ran out of fuel near the French city of Metz on August 31, 1944. Patton expected the theater commander to give him

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[75] Brenton G. Wallace, *Patton and His Third Army* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1946), 163.

[76] Ibid., 19; Blumenson, *The European Theater of Operations,* 514.

priority of support for fuel, ammunition, and other essential supplies so that he could continue his rapid advance towards Germany, but Eisenhower had to modify his approach to the operation. The limitations of logistic support prevented Eisenhower from conducting rapid advances along his entire front; providing adequate supplies to allow any one commander to conduct sustained ground combat operations or execute deep thrusts towards Germany meant halting the rest of the front and offering an exposed salient for the Germans to attack. The risk of such an attack breaking through and allowing the Germans to envelop and destroy or capture a large Allied formation eventually led Eisenhower to implement the broad front approach along the Western Front.[77] Although he had long envisioned this approach, Eisenhower faced significant obstacles, including pressure from strategic level leaders to end the war as early as possible when the Allies began to make rapid progress toward Germany after the successful breakout during Operation Cobra. Both Patton and Montgomery in particular continually requested priority of supplies, promising in return a quick crossing of the Rhine and defeat of Germany. After a period in which Eisenhower devoted a significant portion of Allied logistics to Patton's operations, he shifted this support to Montgomery and his 21st Army Group for Operation Market Garden, causing TUSA to exhaust its fuel supplies quickly.[78]

Patton was livid, believing his forces were close enough to the Siegfried Line that he approached Bradley stating, "With 400,000 gallons of gasoline he could be in Germany within two days."[79] Nevertheless, Eisenhower felt compelled to allow Montgomery to attempt the elaborate Operation Market-Garden, forcing the rest of the Allied line to minimize maneuver for

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[77] "Eisenhower to Marshall," August 7, 1944, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 4, Part VIII, Chapter 21, "Breakout", 1886.

[78] Rickard, *Patton at Bay*: 52-53; Blumenson, *The European Theater of Operations*, 670.

[79] Alan Axelrod, *Patton: A Biography* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillen, 2006), 141; D'Este, *Patton*, 670; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers* Vol. 2, 540.

lack of fuel. In late September, TUSA defeated a large German Panzer counterattack, and Patton's forces remained in battle with the Germans from October to November, sustaining heavy casualties. The failure of Operation Market Garden finally empowered Eisenhower to take full control of Allied ground operations along the Western Front; however, supplies remained low until the port of Antwerp finally became operational, and Patton remained frustrated at the lack of progress of his forces, advancing only forty miles as December neared.[80]

Although Eisenhower finally had a firm grasp on operations and determinedly maintained his broad front strategy, attacking only when supplies existed to allow all Allied forces to participate, and enforcing firm limits of advance to avoid presenting a salient for the Germans to attack. Nevertheless, as winter approached the German Army detected a salient near the Ardennes and massing twenty-nine divisions against it to conduct one final counteroffensive, named *Wacht am Rhein* but more commonly referred to as the Battle of the Bulge. On December 19th, during the initial stages of the Battle of the Bulge, Eisenhower called a meeting of all senior Allied commanders to develop a strategy in response to the German assault.[81] Before departing for the meeting, Patton ordered his staff to generate three operational contingency orders to begin offensive operations against the Germans. When Eisenhower asked Patton how long it would take him to conduct a counterattack Patton replied, "On December 22nd, with three divisions."[82]

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[80] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 693; D'Este, *Patton*, 664-65; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers* Vol. 2, 583-84.

[81] "Eisenhower to Bradley and Devers,", December 18, 1944, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 4, Part IX, Chapter 25: "The Battle of the Bulge", 2178; "Blumenson, *The Patton Papers* Vol. 2, 597.

[82] Farago, *Patton*, 709-710.Through a splendid example of staff planning and operational work, Patton's TUSA remained at the ready to begin a counterattack, which it did as soon as Patton contacted his headquarters. TUSA turned two corps around, moved them north, and mounted the counterattack on December 22, 1944; Martin Blumenson, *Patton: The Man Behind the Legend* (New York, NY: William Morrow Publishing, 1985), 247.

Patton then explained his staff had already developed plans for a counterattack. The day after Christmas, the first of Patton's forces established a corridor for relief and resupply of the besieged 101st Airborne Division. Patton's ability to reposition six divisions during the middle of winter, then drive north to relieve Bastogne remains one of his most remarkable achievements of the war, although he must share the credit for this success with his staff and subordinate unit commanders.

Although Hitler's last gasp counterattack during the Battle of the Bulge never had a chance of achieving its goals of penetrating the Allied lines and driving all the way to the coast of France, it did reinforce the wisdom of Eisenhower's broad front approach to which he adhered unfailingly for the rest of the war. By February 1945, with the Germans in full retreat, Patton's forces crossed the Saar and established a vital bridgehead through which Patton pushed units into the Saarland. Patton had insisted upon an immediate crossing of the Saar River against the advice of his officers. Once again, Patton ran out of necessary supplies before achieving his objectives because of the distribution of fuel and ammunition to other commands along the front.[83]

To obtain needed resources, TUSA ordnance units resorted to passing themselves off as First Army personnel, securing thousands of gallons of gasoline from a First Army dump to sustain TUSA operations. Between January and March, TUSA took to the offensive killing or wounding virtually all of the remnants of the German First and Seventh Armies. On March 22nd, the TUSA began crossing the Rhine River after constructing a bridge and slipping a division across the river that evening.[84] Once again demonstrating questionable judgment, on March 26th,

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[83] Rickard, *Patton at Bay*, 233; D'Este, *Patton*, 704; Blumenson, *Patton*, 670, 687; Smith, *Eisenhower's Six Great Decisions*, 146-47.

[84] "Eisenhower to Patton" March 22, 1945, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 4, Part 10, Chapter 26: "Plans and Preparations", 2539; Tony le Tessier, *Patton's Pawns*; *The 94th US Infantry Division at the Siegfried Line* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2007), 293-94; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers* Vol. 2, 660; D'Este, *Patton*, 710; Hirshon, *General Patton*, 616.

Patton sent Task Force Baum, consisting of two hundred and ninety four men in a mixture of thirty five armored and wheeled vehicles, fifty miles behind German lines to liberate a prisoner of war camp predicated on the belief that Patton's son-in-law, captured in North Africa, had been in captivity. The raid was a complete failure, and of the two hundred and ninety four men who initiated the raid, TUSA suffered nine men killed, sixteen wounded, and all the vehicles destroyed.[85] Eisenhower soon learned of the secret mission, and once again found himself furious with Patton because of his repeated recklessness.[86] Patton, reflecting on his actions believed he should have sent a force about three times larger at Hammelburg and continued to harbor ill feelings surrounding his actions in Metz.

In his memoirs, Patton admitted to making only one mistake during the war, his raid on Hammelburg to rescue American prisoners. Later, he also admitted that his insistence upon directly assaulting, instead of bypassing, Metz was an error.[87]The chief obstacle to TUSA's advance was Metz, and Patton consistently failed to handle the city properly at the operational level (refer figure 4. Third Army at Metz). The difficulties stemmed directly from Patton's insistence that Metz be occupied rather than screened.

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[85] D'Este, *Patton*, 715-6. Blumenson, *The Patton Papers* Vol. 2, 670-1; Hirshon, *Patton*, 620-3.

[86] "Eisenhower to Marshall," April 15, 1945, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Volume 4, Part X, Chapter 28: "The mission of this Allied force was fulfilled", 2614-17; Russel F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany 1944-1945 Volume II* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 1981.

[87] Paul D. Harkins, *When the Third Cracked Europe: The Story of Patton's Incredible Army* (Harrisburg, PA: Army Time Publishing, 1969), 57; Blumenson, *The Patton Papers* Vol. 2, 676.

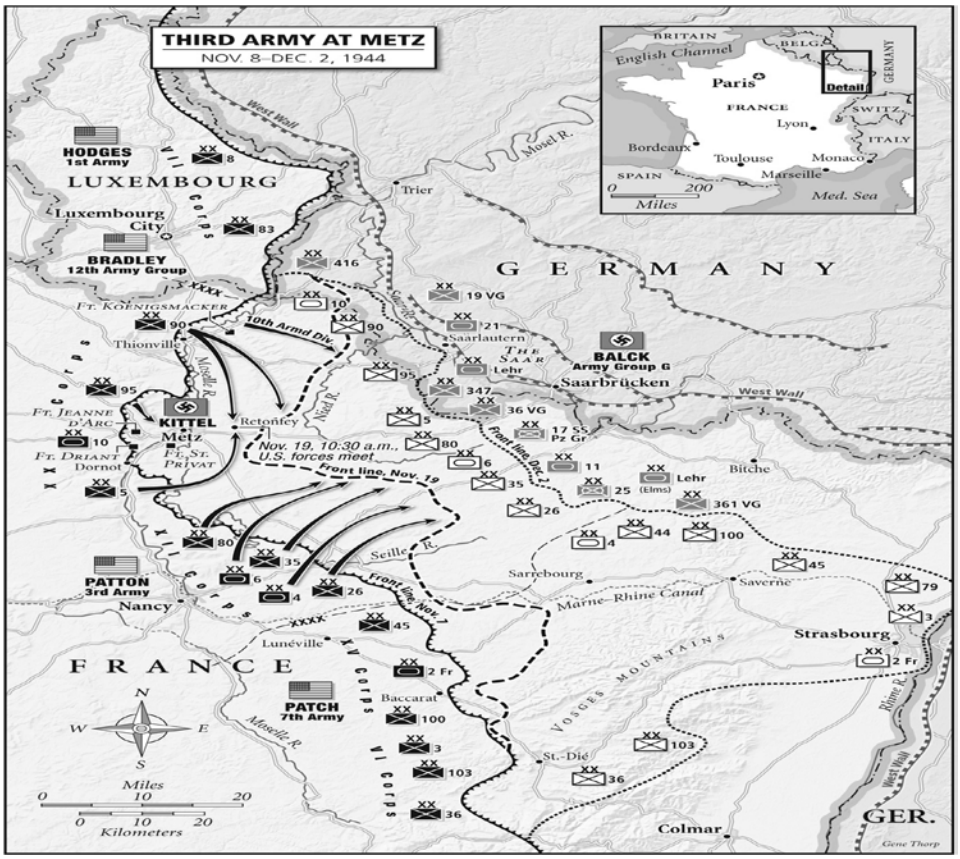

Figure 4. Third Army at Metz

Source: Rick Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2013), 344.

Analysis

Indeed, Metz was the key to the entire campaign, and the long siege there was of his own making, but it may have had a great psychological effect on Patton who simply refused to allow the American Army to be defeated by an old fortress. A better alternative would have been to screen it. One of Patton's many biographers, Carlo D'Este, characterized the ill-defined, yet vital ingredient for a successful commander as, "the ability to sense instinctively the right course of action on the battlefield" and believed that Patton possessed this essential trait to a "marked

degree."[88] However, Patton only seemed to choose the best course of action when he had the enemy off or on the run attributable to his personality and cavalry upbringing. In short, Patton's actions were less decisive when the enemy was less prone to movement and maneuver.[89] Eisenhower would remark that Patton would become more "pessimistic and discouraging" during battles that failed to align with movement and speed.[90] There is no question that Patton could be highly creative with the enemy on the run, however, the fact remains that in a reduced capacity he was not quite as effective. His difficulties elicited a failure to make sound tactical decisions due to his incompatibility of his established battle philosophy with the prevailing battle conditions.[91]

Patton's genius for fire and maneuver is beyond doubt; however, his limited experience in static fighting prior in the Rhineland was a disadvantage. Historian Martin Blumenson stated that the American Army Commander's in Europe "showed a decided tendency to stay within the odds, the safe way of operating, and refrained from opting for the imaginative or unexpected."[92]

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[88] Carlo D'Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1988), 61.

[89] Ian V. Hogg, *The Biography of General George S. Patton* (New York, NY: 1982), 123.

[90] "Eisenhower to Frank McCarthy," January 6, 1966, copy in personal possession of Alan Aimone, Chief of Special Operations,West Point Library. Eisenhower wrote this personal and confidential assessment of Patton for McCarthy, the director of the film *Patton.* In discussing army boundaries with Bradley and Hodges on August 5, Patton recorded his preference to avoid close fighting. "I succeeded in getting the boundary… I desire." He wrote, "as it keeps me on the outside – on the running edge." *The Patton Papers* Vol. 2, 501.

[91] Rickard, *Patton at Bay*, 235-39.

[92] Martin Blumenson, "America's World War II Leaders in Europe: Some Thoughts," *Parameters, US Army War College Quarterly XIX, 4* (December 1989): 3.

Conclusion

Since the end of WWII, historians like Martin Blumenson, Carlo D'Este, H. Essame, and Bill O'Reilly have written numerous accounts of Patton's generalship. Such works continue to appear in bookstores and libraries, as well as the bookshelves of readers, and discussions of Patton remain lively on popular social media sites. Historians and pop culture enthusiasts alike continue to adopt the widespread and compelling narrative of Patton's warlike genius and ability to do the impossible. However, a critical review of Patton's actions during the Tunisia, Sicily, and Rhineland campaigns reveals a different story than the one typically told in accounts of Patton's career. The three case studies in this monograph demonstrate how Patton successfully employed forces at the tactical level, but failed to apply operational art in a manner most effective and appropriate for the Allies.

During his forty-three days in command of II Corps in Tunisia, Patton achieved success in combat and historians have credited him for contributing to the Americans' first major victory against the Germans. Further analysis reveals, however, that at the troop and tactical level he achieved some successes, but his actions lacked originality, imagination, and lethality while placing further strain on the already tense Anglo-American relationship. He led unremarkable operations in Gafsa and El Guettar, both of which followed extensive planning by the II Corps staff, leaving the execution of the plan to Patton who benefited from a misguided German counterattack. These and other tactical successes merely contributed to the Patton myth among both worldwide media outlets and America's own War Department. These uncritical assessments contributed to the aura of Patton's genius while neglecting to mention that his achievements occurred only at the tactical level. The II Corps would go on to perform well under its new commander (Bradley), eventually participating in a combined effort leading to the fall of Tunis, leading some historians to question whether Patton deserved full credit for the success of II Corps.

Operation Husky typically appears in historical accounts as one of Patton's monumental achievements and a tribute to his cavalier and daring personality. However, during this campaign his audacity passed over into recklessness and repeated instances of poor judgment. This recklessness stemmed from his personal desire for glory, his rivalry with Montgomery, and an obvious lack of respect for Eisenhower. His poor planning and coordination of amphibious assaults airborne landings led to unnecessary losses and some of the worst instances of fratricide in US military history; these missteps remain clear evidence of Patton's poor understanding of the complexity and responsibilities of operational level command. Patton seemingly ignored logistics entirely, except when crowing for more support so that he could continue conducting a simplistic form of warfare consisting primarily of repeated frontal assaults, seeking to achieve gains regardless of risk. His personality flaws, while perhaps not directly related to his ability to conduct operational art, attract far less attention than his tactical successes, revealing signs of an overall lack of objectivity in assessing Patton's combat leadership. Again, Patton demonstrated an inability to master those elements needed to move beyond mere tactical proficiency to tactical excellence, much less an awareness of operational art. Throughout operations in Sicily, Patton placed his personal desire for glory before the needs of the Allies as they sought to achieve the strategic end state. Perhaps his lapses in judgment that eventually led Eisenhower to pass him over for command during Operation Overlord actually benefited the Allied war effort in its final campaigns in Western Europe.

The combination of logistics shortfalls and Patton's personal desires to fight on his own terms served as the chief obstacles to Patton and the TUSA's advance during the Rhineland Campaign. Eisenhower's broad front strategy constrained Patton to an operational approach that forced him to fight according to Eisenhower's vision of operational art, placing him in unfamiliar intellectual territory. Patton adhered to Eisenhower's broad front strategy because he had no choice; even his best efforts to cheat the system to acquire additional fuel and ammunition only

worked for short periods, providing him only brief opportunities to choose the best tactical course of action when he did manage to land a blow against the retreating enemy. The idea of Patton as a genius for war does not mesh with his continued efforts to advocate a flawed approach to operational art in Western Europe demonstrated by the failure of Operation Market Garden and the German exploitation of the opportunity presented by the salient in Allied lines during the Battle of the Bulge. Even at the tactical level, Patton's approach proved indecisive when the enemy refused to engage in a contest of movement and maneuver. There is no question that Patton could be highly creative with the enemy on the run in a tactical action, but he proved far less effective as a combat commander participating in a long-term campaign at the operational level. His difficulties elicited a failure to make sound tactical decisions due to the incompatibility of his established battle philosophy with the prevailing battlefield conditions. Patton's genius appears limited to tactical actions involving fire and maneuver, particularly when assessing his effectiveness in the more stabilized approach required on the Western Front in Europe from 1944 to 1945.

Implications

The analysis of General Patton's leadership and employment of operational art when assessed over three campaigns serves to illustrate several key points. First, throughout Patton's career he demonstrated unsurpassed leadership and tactical skills when required, and given ideal conditions. At the corps level and below he instilled the warrior ethos, discipline, and tactical proficiency among his troops. When the need to conduct operations above the corps level arose, Patton seemed out of his element, repeatedly arguing with and defying Eisenhower while failing to understand the strategic consequences of his actions. Patton became increasingly insensitive to the needs of his superiors and seemed incapable of adapting his behavior to not only the military objectives, but the political aims as well. As Clausewitz wrote, "…war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on by other

means."[93] As military action is elevated above the tactical level, a greater sensitivity is required to apply the use of force. The critical evaluation of Patton's actions during the three campaigns described above reveals his flawed employment of operational art during WWII. It illustrates the actions of a commander with reasonable skill at the tactical level, marred by occasional lack of imagination and lapses of judgment, and a flawed understanding of operational art and the political implications of his actions. A "Genius for War" and master operational artist must have a complete grasp of the political aims as well as the acumen necessary to operate within the constraints of the means available. Patton did neither of these consistently.

Recommendations

As the degree of complexity of the operational environment in contemporary warfare continues to evolve, the selection of commanders must involve assessment of leaders' demonstrated ability to conduct operational art. Based solely on tactical military performance, many candidates might seem acceptable, or even optimal, but higher levels of command will require leaders who remain in tune to both the campaign planning considerations and the political nuances of modern operational art. Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates wrote in *Duty*, when explaining his decision to relieve General Dave McKiernan of the command of International Security Afghanistan Forces (ISAF) in 2008, "Perhaps more than anything it was two years' experience in watching Generals like Petraeus, McChrystal, Chiarelli, Rod Rodriguez, . . . and observing their flexibility in embracing new ideas, their willingness to experiment, and their ability to abandon an idea that didn't pan out and move to something else."[94] The point is illustrative of the future requirement to select the appropriate commander who has the ability to

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[93] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael E. Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 87-89.

[94] Robert M. Gates, *Duty* (New York, NY: Random House, 2014), 344.

fight and win at all levels of war (tactical, operational, and strategic). Patton lacked this genius for war; he did not possess the ability to conduct operational art, connecting his tactical actions in time, space, and purpose to achieve the strategic aim. Doing so as part of a coalition and in a manner consistent with an operational approach that best suited both the theater strategy and the capabilities and limitations of those Allied organizations only further highlighted his weaknesses as a commander. Patton demonstrated skill as a tactician and an effective combat leader; however, history shows that he did not possess the attributes of an operational artist.

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